

PRESS ADVISORY

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New Zealand Apple Moth Report Finds Increasing Support

Growing Body of Experts Confirm Light Brown Apple Moth Largely Controlled by Natural Predators in New Zealand, Eradication in California will Not Work

Santa Cruz CA — Scientists and agricultural groups in the U.S. and New Zealand continue to question the safety, necessity, and effectiveness of the State's embattled Light Brown Apple Moth (LBAM) eradication program, which is scheduled to begin aerial spraying over the Central Coast and Bay Area this summer.

Expert comments support the findings of a report released in early March that indicates that LBAM is largely controlled by natural predators and is not a threat to crops or wild land plants in New Zealand and that the same will prove to be true for LBAM in California. The report, "Integrated Pest Management Practices for the Light Brown Apple Moth in New Zealand: Implications for California" by Dr. Daniel Harder, Executive Director of the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum and Jeff Rosendale, Watsonville grower and horticultural consultant, concludes that California should suspend its LBAM eradication program.

Entomologist Philippa Stevens, a bioprotection expert at HortResearch, the New Zealand government agricultural and horticultural research agency, notes that an occasional light brown apple moth is found on avocados, kiwis, apples, persimmons and citrus, among other plants. "Although it has been recorded on the crops, it is not a significant pest," Stevens notes.

In the past few weeks, an increasingly diverse set of agricultural and academic interests have spoken out against State's LBAM eradication plan and in favor of a more scientifically grounded approach, including California Certified Organic Farmers (CCOF), U.C. Davis entomologist and invasive species expert James Carey, the Marin County Farm Bureau, and Marin Agriculture Commissioner Stacy Carlsen.

CCOF's latest statement on the LBAM program "revokes support of aerial application" and questions "whether an eradication program can be successful," acknowledging that "the repeated spraying of an untested material and its inert ingredients on a large populated area is not desirable." CCOF notes that "pests such as the LBAM are successfully controlled on organic farms throughout California using cultural controls, natural predators, pheromone products, and proven biological insecticides" and urges the State to adopt a precautionary approach.

At a hearing before the California Assembly Agriculture Committee last week, Professor Carey testified that LBAM has likely been in the state for decades and cannot be eradicated: "The current distribution of the Light Brown Apple Moth in California, covering 10 counties with a combined area of more than 8,000 to 10,000 square miles (i.e., the size of Connecticut) suggests that this pest is not a recent introduction but has been in the state for many years, perhaps 30 to 50 years or longer." Carey added, "The history of eradication programs in which an exotic insect is as widespread as LBAM is in California suggests that we have little if any chance of success because several key preconditions for conducting a successful eradication program are unmet."

CDFA's statement that LBAM has done no crop damage in California combined with Carey's testimony suggests that the risk posed by the moth is small.

Dr. Mike Butcher, entomologist and Technical Manager for Pipfruit NZ, an industry trade group in New Zealand, underscored the likelihood that natural predators in California will control LBAM. LBAM in New Zealand "is not a major problem," Butcher said and added "Usually the insects that attack leaf rollers are general. I would expect your native predators to move onto the light brown apple moth as well as they attack native leaf rollers."

In a letter last Thursday, Domini Grossi, President of the Marin Farm Bureau said "we acknowledge the public health concerns of aerial spraying, and request that [Secretary Kawamura] adopt an aggressive, proactive ground-based approach now." Concerns about aerial spraying have been echoed for the past two weeks by Marin County Agriculture Commissioner Stacy Carlsen who publicly called for a "ground attack" on the moth in yesterday's *Marin Independent-Journal*.

Last fall, CDFA conducted several rounds of aerial pesticide spraying in Monterey and Santa Cruz counties as part of an attempt to eradicate LBAM. Hundreds of residents reported adverse health effects following the spraying.

CDFA staff scientists have commented on the New Zealand report. CDFA lead staff entomologist Kevin Hoffman noted in a March 15 interview with the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*, "There is value [in the report] if at some point the CDFA and USDA decide not to eradicate."

Concerned with misinformation being circulated about their report, Harder and Rosendale authored a clarification document, "The Light Brown Apple Moth in New Zealand: Fact vs. Fiction," with support from peers.

To view the New Zealand report and clarification document and learn more about the LBAM issue, visit Assemblymember John Laird's website: <http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a27/moth.htm>

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